

# 013778 - San Juan Creek/San Mateo Creek SAMP

Contributed by Jae Chung  
Wednesday, 27 December 2006

UPDATE: Jan. 3, 2007 - Final Environment Impact Statement (4.60MB PDF)  
Mar. 16, 2007 - Record of Decision signed for the Final Environmental Impact Statement

## Executive Summary

Currently, local, state, and federal agencies, in cooperation with local landowners, are engaged in coordinated land use and natural resource conservation planning efforts to address future economic development within a 91,000-acre portion of Southern Orange County. The three planning processes underway are: 1) an amendment to Orange County's General Plan and Zone Change; 2) development of a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP); and 3) development of a Natural Community Conservation Plan/Master Streambed Alteration Agreement /Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/MSAA/HCP).

The respective lead agencies (Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District for the SAMP; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, and the County of Orange for the NCCP/MSAA/HCP; and the County of Orange for the General Plan Amendment/Zone Change) and cooperating landowners involved with the development of these plans agree that a coordinated approach is the best method to address the sensitive biological, aquatic, and hydrological resources of Southern Orange County. Although all of the lead agencies will coordinate the development and completion of the plans, each of the agencies will be required to prepare separate environmental decision documents for each plan (i.e., Environmental Impact Statements/Reports (EIS/EIR)), in accordance with their respective legislative requirements and regulations.

The SAMP is an important component of these planning efforts. The Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District is conducting a comprehensive aquatic resource plan to achieve a balance between aquatic resource protection and reasonable economic development. SAMPs are designed to be conducted in geographic areas of special sensitivity under intense development pressure.

There are three main goals of the SAMP process: to allow reasonable economic development and infrastructure construction, to establish an aquatic resource conservation program with willing landowners, and to minimize individual and cumulative impacts of future projects in these watersheds. At the end of the SAMP process, there will be areas that will be protected and preserved, as well as areas where future activities would be allowed to occur, provided that they meet specific criteria developed for protection of the watersheds.

The SAMP consists of three phases. Phase I includes identification and characterization of aquatic resources in the Southern Orange County. Phase II involves preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement including the Section 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis. Phase III of the SAMP involves finalizing the environmental documents, completion of an aquatic resource restoration plan, and finally issuance of Section 404 permits.

## Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of a SAMP?

The Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District conducts comprehensive aquatic resource plans to achieve a balance between aquatic resource protection and reasonable economic development. SAMPs are designed to be conducted in geographic areas of special sensitivity under intense development pressure. Interagency, public, and stakeholder involvement is an essential part of a SAMP.

Where is the Corps developing these SAMPs?

SAMPs are currently being conducted in the San Diego Creek watershed; San Juan Creek and portions of San Mateo Creek watersheds in Orange County; western Riverside County including portions of San Jacinto and upper Santa Margarita watersheds; and Otay River watershed in San Diego County.

What will be the end result of the process?

There are two main products of the SAMP process: an alternate permitting process in consideration of the aquatic resources within a particular SAMP area and a coordinated aquatic resource management and restoration strategy. With completion of a SAMP, there will be areas where future activities would be allowed to occur, provided they meet specific criteria developed for protection of the watersheds, as well as areas that will be protected and preserved through conservation easements, local land use zoning, and/or restrictions on Section 404 permits. To this end, an anticipated

end result is an alternate program-level permitting process.

What is the effect of the SAMP on growth/environmental protection in the study areas?

The SAMP process is expected to provide better scientific information to improve the decision making process, allow for a comprehensive approach for the management of aquatic resources, provide predictability to the local citizens, and reflect the needs of the communities situated within these watersheds.

What is the benefit of SAMPs?

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Corps of Engineers regulates discharge of dredge or fill material into waters of the United States. SAMPs are more environmentally sensitive than the conventional project-by project process; the conventional approach is less sensitive to evaluating the cumulative loss of resources over time. The SAMP approach allows the Corps to take into account indirect and cumulative effects on aquatic resources in a way not possible in the project-by-project process. With the SAMP approach, we can analyze potential impacts at the watershed scale in order to identify priority areas for preservation, identify potential restoration areas, and determine the least environmentally damaging locations for proposed projects.

What is the first step in developing a SAMP?

Phase I of the SAMP includes the completion of studies to identify the aquatic resources in the project area and to characterize their condition. Other technical studies that aid in understanding aquatic resources in the watersheds will also be conducted.

What happens after the technical studies are completed?

The next phase of the SAMP will consist of compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As part of our compliance with NEPA an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared for each SAMP. Phase II of the process will include the preparation of the Draft EIS and analysis of project alternatives.

Phase III entails the establishment of an aquatic resource conservation program, as well as an alternate permitting process under Section 404 of the CWA. Future projects may be authorized under the alternative permitting process if they meet specific criteria designed to avoid and minimize impacts to aquatic resources.

Who is responsible for the SAMP?

The Corps of Engineers is the lead Federal agency for the SAMP.

Are other agencies involved?

Other participating public agencies include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the County of Orange. Concurrently, the CDFG is undertaking a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement to fulfill the requirements of Sections 1600 of the state Fish and Game Code.

The SAMP/MSAA is one component of the coordinated land use and natural resource conservation planning efforts underway within this 91,000-acre portion of Southern Orange County. The following are two other concurrent planning processes: an amendment to the County's General Plan and Zone Change; and development of a Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP).

#### Related Links

Website for the LA District Regulatory Branch:

<http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/regulatory>

#### Public Notices and Other Documents

- San Juan Creek and Portions of San Mateo Creek Watershed Aquatic Resources Delineation (2.9MB PDF)
- Assessment of Riparian Ecosystem Integrity In the San Juan/San Mateo Watersheds, Orange County, California (1.56MB PDF)
- San Juan Creek Watershed/Western San Mateo Creek Watershed Special Area Management Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement (4MB PDF)
- Special Public Notice for the Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS (91 KB PDF)
- Special Public Notice for Proposed Regional General Permit (618KB PDF)
- Special Public Notice for Proposed Letter of Permission Procedures (667KB PDF)
- Special Public Notice for Proposed Letter of Permission Procedures for the Rancho Mission Viejo (563KB PDF)
- Special Public Notice 199916236-YJC (94KB PDF)
- Draft EIS Graphics available upon request

#### Upcoming Events